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Traveling With Your Pet

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United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

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Traveling With Your Pet

Dogs, cats, and most other warm-blooded animals transported in commerce are protected by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) enforces this law.

APHIS' shipping regulations help ensure that people who transport and handle animals covered under the AWA treat them humanely. Airlines and other shippers are affected by regulations established to protect the well–being of animals in transit.

Trip Preparation for Air Transportation

Before taking a flight with your animal, have your veterinarian examine your pet to ensure that it is healthy enough to make the trip. Airlines and State health officials generally require health certificates for all animals transported by air. In most cases, health certificates must be issued by a licensed veterinarian who examined the animal within 10 days of transport.

Ask your veterinarian to provide any required vaccinations or treatments. Administer tranquilizers only if specifically prescribed by your veterinarian and only in the prescribed dosage.

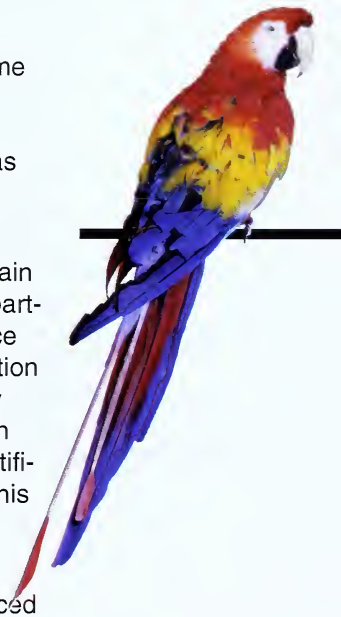
Trips Outside the Continental United States

Hawaii, U.S. territories, and certain foreign governments have quarantine or health requirements for arriving pets. For information on Hawaii's requirements, contact your State Veterinarian's office. For U.S. territories and foreign countries, contact the appropriate embassy, governmental agency, or

consulate at least 4 weeks in advance. You may also contact a full-service travel agency for assistance.

Additional airline requirements also exist for international flights. These rules may require additional ventilation, labeling, and a shipper's certification. Contact your airline for information about these requirements.

Bird Travel Abroad



Bird owners who take their pets with them while traveling abroad are generally exempted from some of the USDA quarantine and foreign certification requirements for imported birds. This exception applies only to U.S.-origin birds and is permitted as long as the owner makes special arrangements in advance.

If you wish to take your bird abroad, you must obtain all necessary documents from USDA and the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before departing the United States. Such preparation is especially critical for birds covered by the treaty known as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. You should get a health certificate endorsed by a USDA–APHIS veterinarian. This endorsement is subject to a user fee.

U.S.-origin birds may reenter the United States through any international airport that can be serviced by a USDA veterinary official. For more information on traveling abroad with your bird, contact USDA–APHIS Veterinary Services at 4700 River Road, Unit 39, Riverdale, MD 20737–1231. The telephone number is (301) 734–5097.

Airline Procedures

No airline will guarantee acceptance of an animal it has not seen. Important considerations for acceptance of animals include the health and disposition of the animal, proper health certificates, and kennel markings and sizing. Airlines also require that, if wheels are installed as part of a kennel, they be removed or rendered inoperable prior to transport. This action prevents kennels from rolling, protecting both the animals and airline employees. USDA assigns airlines the final responsibility for determining the safety and compliance of the kennels they accept.

Airlines generally transport animals in the cargo compartment of a plane. In doing so, the airlines advise the flight crew that animals are onboard the aircraft. Some airlines allow passengers to carry their pets in the cabin of a plane if the animals are capable of fitting under the passengers' seat. Carryon pets are not protected under the AWA.

Certain animals are accepted as baggage at passenger check-in locations, and others are accepted as cargo at the airlines' cargo facilities. For the specific requirements pertaining to your animal, make advance arrangements with the airline you are using.

Airlines must ensure that they have facilities to handle animals at the airports of transfer and final destination. Airlines must comply with USDA–APHIS guidelines on allowable temperature limits for animal-holding areas.

Finally, airlines are not required to carry live animals, and they reserve the right to refuse to carry an animal for any reason.

Pet Travel Requirements

Age. Dogs and cats must be at least 8 weeks old and must have been weaned before traveling by air.

Kennels. Kennels must meet minimum standards for size, strength, sanitation, and ventilation.

- *Size and Strength*—Kennels must be enclosed and allow room for the animal to stand, sit, and lie in a natural position. They must be easy to open, strong enough to withstand the normal rigors of transportation, and free of objects that could injure the animal.

- *Sanitation*—Kennels must have a solid, leakproof floor that is covered with litter or absorbent lining. Wire or other ventilated subfloors are generally allowed; pegboard flooring is prohibited. These requirements provide the maximum cleanliness for the animal in travel.

■ *Ventilation*—Kennels must be well ventilated with openings that make up at least 14 percent of the total wall space. At least one-third of the openings must be located in the top half of the kennel. Kennels also must have rims to prevent ventilation openings from being blocked by other cargo. These rims—usually placed on the sides of the kennel—must provide at least three-quarters of an inch clearance.

■ *Grips and Markings*—Kennels must have grips or handles for lifting to prevent cargo personnel from having to place their fingers inside the kennel and risk being bitten. Kennels also must be marked "live animals" or "wild animals" on the top and one side with directional arrows indicating proper position of the kennel. Lettering must be at least 1 inch high.

■ *Animals per Kennel*—Each species must have its own kennel with the exception of compatible cats and dogs of similar size. Maximum numbers include 2 puppies or kittens under 6 months old and 20 pounds each and of similar size, 15 guinea pigs or rabbits, and 50 hamsters. Airlines may have more restrictive requirements, such as allowing only one adult animal per kennel. Be sure to check with the airline you are using.

Feeding and Watering While Traveling

Instructions for feeding and watering the animal over a 24-hour period must be attached to the kennel. The 24-hour schedule will assist the airline in providing care for your animal in case it is diverted from its original destination. You as a pet owner or shipper are required to document that the animal was offered food and water within 4 hours of transport, and the documentation must include the time and date of feeding.

Food and water dishes must be securely attached and be accessible to caretakers without opening the kennel. Food and water must be provided to puppies and kittens every 12 hours if they are 8 to 16 weeks old. Mature animals must be fed every 24 hours and given water every 12 hours.

Other Helpful Hints

■ As far in advance of the trip as possible, let your pet get to know the flight kennel. Veterinarians recommend leaving it open in the house with an old sock or other familiar object in it.

■ At the time you make your trip reservations, advise the airline directly that you will have an animal with you. Be sure to reconfirm with the airline 24–48 hours before departure that you will be bringing your pet. Advance arrangements are not a guarantee that your animal will travel on a specific flight.

■ Arrive at the airport with plenty of time to spare. If your animal is traveling as a carryon pet or by the special expedited delivery service, check-in will usually be at the passenger terminal.

■ If you are sending your pet through the cargo system, you will need to go to the airline cargo terminal, which is usually located in a separate part of the airport. Be sure to check with your airline for the acceptance cutoff time for your flight. Note that by regulation an animal may be presented for transport no more than 4 hours before flight time (6 hours by special arrangement).

■ Use direct flights whenever possible to avoid accidental transfers or delays.

■ Travel on the same flight as your pet whenever possible.

■ Remember that pug-nosed dogs, such as boxers and bulldogs, are more likely to experience breathing problems during transport.

■ In the summer, choose early morning or late evening flights to avoid temperature extremes that may affect your pet. Avoid holiday traveling whenever possible.

■ Carry a leash with you so that you may walk your pet before check-in and after arrival. **Do not** place the leash inside the kennel or attach it to the outside of the kennel.

■ Do not take your pet out of its kennel inside the airport. In keeping with airport regulations and courtesy for other passengers, let your pet out only after you leave the terminal building.

■ Outfit your pet with a sturdy collar and two identification tags. The tags should have both your permanent address and telephone number and an address and telephone number where you can be reached while traveling.

■ Attach a label on the pet carrier with your permanent and travel addresses and telephone numbers.

Departures Salidas
Arrivals Llegadas

■ Make sure your pet's nails have been recently clipped to prevent them from hooking onto the carrier door or other openings.

■ Carry a current photograph of your pet. If your pet is accidentally lost, having a current photograph will make the search easier.

■ If you need to file a complaint regarding the care of your pet during transport, contact USDA–APHIS.

If Your Pet Gets Lost...

If your pet should turn up missing during transport, immediately speak to airline personnel. Many airlines have computer tracking systems that can trace a pet transferred to an incorrect flight. Should there be no report of your animal, proceed with the following steps:

■ Contact animal control agencies and humane societies in the local and surrounding areas. Check with them daily.

■ Contact the APHIS Animal Care regional office closest to where your pet was lost.

■ Provide descriptions and photographs to the airline, local animal control agencies, and humane societies. Help can also be sought from radio stations. Leave telephone numbers and addresses with all these people or businesses should you have to return home.

APHIS Contacts

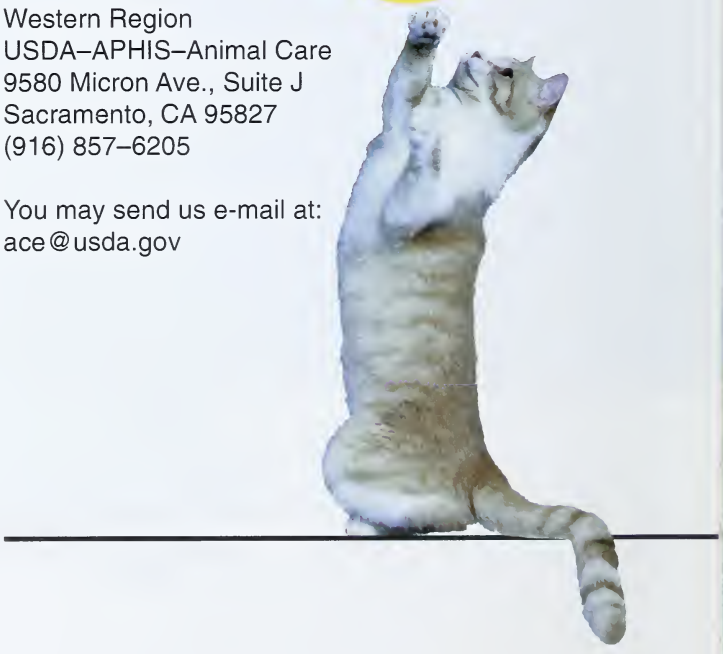
For further information, call 1–800–545–USDA, visit our World Wide Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/ac, or write to:

Deputy Administrator
USDA–APHIS–Animal Care
4700 River Road, Unit 84
Riverdale, MD 20737–1234
(301) 734–4981

or local regional offices at:

Eastern Region
USDA–APHIS–Animal Care
2568–A Riva Rd., #302
Annapolis, MD 21401
(410) 571–8692

Central Region
USDA–APHIS–Animal Care
P.O. Box 6258
Fort Worth Federal Center, Bldg. #11
Fort Worth, TX 76115
(817) 885–6910

Western Region
USDA–APHIS–Animal Care
9580 Micron Ave., Suite J
Sacramento, CA 95827
(916) 857–6205

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